6: Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1951
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CHAPTER V

# KUNAPIPI RITUAL IN DRAWING

In order to understand more fully certain parts of the Kunapipi ritual that have been already outlined, a series of interpretative drawings was obtained from aborigines. Each of these depicts in conventionalized form some aspects of the Kunapipi, and includes some points which the artist considered to be of major importance in understanding the function of the rituals. The six drawings illustrated and described here cover the main points of the Kunapipi ceremony.

Ceremonial elders and headmen at Yirrkalla delegated a middle-aged man, named Gumuk,[1] a Kunapipi leader, to prepare the following series of drawings on Kunapipi ritual. It is not the practice of these people to record their ceremonies in this way; normally, to demonstrate or expound some particular point, they would enact the ceremony instead of drawing it; neither would they attempt to draw such incidents on stringy-bark, the usual medium for expressing sacred or secular design and representation. The medium employed in these drawings was entirely foreign to the artist, who is accustomed to working in ochres with hair or root brushes, on a bark board; but, in this case, sheets of brown paper and coloured lumber crayons were adopted for convenience. It was not long before the native artists had adjusted themselves to this method of expression, and produced what we may term masterpieces, equal to the best of the bark-drawing which is their traditional form of art.[2]

Their value as artistic representations of this particular culture is incidental here to their value as documents illustrating the Kunapipi rituals. Through them we may see with a native's eyes what the people as a group, through the individual artist, consider important in this respect.

Photographs of ritual and ceremony record accurately specific incidents divorced to some extent from the whole; they are in themselves impersonal. But drawings of the same or similar incidents, by

1. *Vide* Chapter VI, where some of his dreams are discussed.
2. Collections of both bark and brown paper drawings are at present housed in the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, for the Australian National Research Council.
   For discussion of bark painting, see *Art in Arnhem Land*, by A. P. Elkin, R. and C. Berndt. pp. 61-83